

WHAT THE FARM LABORERS CAN DO AND WHAT THEY CANNOT DO

NO. 1603

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 12, 1881,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how. For the earth brings forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”
Mark 4:26-29.

LAST Lord's-day morning our subject was the laborers upon God's farm and their great Master. And then we tried to show how far human agency was necessary in the work of the Gospel. We also saw how thoroughly all holy results depend upon God, for neither he that sows nor he that waters is anything, but God who gives the increase. We have much the same subject this morning, only it goes a little deeper, and yet more fully shows how far the laborer can go and how far he cannot go—where man may enter with holy industry, and where no human work can possibly intrude. Our subject on this occasion will mainly be the measure and limit of human instrumentality in the kingdom of grace. If we shall be taught of the Spirit of God, we shall find this Scripture to be full of instruction upon the matter.

It is remarkable that the parable before us is peculiar to Mark. No other evangelist has recorded it, but we do not think any the less of it on that account. If it had been told to us four times, we should have been glad to hear the repetition and would have given it fourfold attention. As it is told us but once, we will give the more earnest heed to a voice which speaks once for all. We are glad that the Holy Spirit led Mark to reserve this pearl out of the many excellent things which our Lord said which have been lost. John tells us that if a record of all the works which Jesus did could have been preserved, they would have made a library so large that scarcely the world itself could have contained all the books.

Many of the things that Jesus said floated about, no doubt, for a time and were gradually forgotten, and we have to be thankful to the Spirit of God for perpetuating this choice similitude by the hand of His servant Mark. Preserved in the amber of inspiration, this choice instruction is of priceless value.

Here is a lesson for sowers—for the laborers upon the farm of God. It is a parable for all who are concerned in the kingdom of God. It will be of little value to those who are in the kingdom of darkness, for they are not bidden to sow the good seed. “Unto the wicked God says, what have you to do to declare my statutes?” But all who are loyal subjects to King Jesus, all who are commissioned to scatter seed for the Royal Husbandman, will be glad to know how the kingdom advances, glad to know how the harvest is preparing for Him whom they serve.

Listen, then, you that sow beside all waters—you that with holy diligence seek to fill the garner of your God—listen and may the Spirit of God speak into your ears as you are able to hear it.

I. We shall, first, learn from our text WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT WE CANNOT DO. Let this stand as our first head.

“So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground.” This, the gracious worker can do. “And the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how.” This is what he cannot do—it belongs to a higher power. Man can neither make the seed spring nor grow up—he is out of the field in that respect and may go home—“to sleep, and rise night and day.” Seed once sown is beyond human jurisdiction and is under divine care.

Yet ere long the worker comes in again—"When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle." We can reap in due season, and it is both our duty and privilege so to do. You see, then, that there is a place for the worker at the beginning, and though there is no room for him in the middle passage, yet another opportunity is given him further on when that which he sowed has actually yielded fruit.

Notice, then, that *we can sow*. Any man who has received the knowledge of the grace of God in his heart can teach others. I include under the term "man," all who know the Lord, be they male or female. We cannot all teach alike, for all have not the same gifts—to one is given one talent and to another ten. Neither have we all the same opportunities, for one lives in obscurity and another has far-reaching influence. Yet there is not within the family of God an infant hand which may not drop its own tiny seed into the ground.

There is not a man among us who needs to stand idle in the marketplace, for work suitable to his strength is waiting for him. There is not a saved woman who is not left a holy task. Let her do it and win the approving word. "She has done what she could." Something of sacred service is within the reach of everyone's capacity, whether it be the mother in the family, the nurse-girl with the infant, the boy in the school, the workman at the bench, or the nurse at the bedside. Those with the smallest range of opportunities can, nevertheless, do something for Christ and His cause. The precious seed of the Word of God is small as a grain of mustard seed, and may be carried by the feeblest hand where it shall multiply a hundred-fold.

We need never quarrel with God because we cannot do everything if He only permits us to do this one thing, for sowing the good seed is a work which will need all our wit, our strength, our love, our care. Holy seed sowing may well be adopted as our highest pursuit and is no inferior object for the noblest life that can be led. You will need heavenly teaching that you may carefully select the wheat and keep it free from the darnel of error. We must even winnow out of it our own thoughts and opinions, for these may not be according to the mind of God.

Men are not saved by our word, but by God's Word. We are bound to see that we know the Gospel and teach the whole of it. To different men we must, with discretion, bring forward that part of the Word of God which will best bear upon their consciences—for much may depend upon the Word being in *season* and not a chance sentence thrown out at random. We shall have enough to do if we look well to the seed basket, lest, peradventure, we should sow tares as well as wheat, or should cast good seed wantonly, where it can only feed evil birds.

Having selected the seed, we shall have plenty of work if we go forth and sow it broadcast everywhere, for every day brings its opportunity and every company furnishes its occasion. "In the morning sow your seed, in the evening withhold not your hand." "Sow beside all waters." Imitate the sower in the parable, who was not so penny-wise that he would only cast the seed where, according to his judgment, all was good soil, but who, feeling that he had other work for his judgment besides the selecting of the soil, threw the seed right and left as he went on his way, and denied not a handful even to thorny and rocky soils. You, dear fellow workers, will have enough to do if at all times and in all places, as prudence and zeal suggest, you spread abroad the living Word of the living Lord.

Still, wise sowers discover favorable opportunities for sowing and gladly seize upon them. There are times when it would clearly be a waste to sow, for the soil could not receive it—it is not in a fit condition. After a shower, or before a shower, or at some such time as he that has studied husbandry knows, is the time to be up and doing. So while we are to work for God always, yet there are seasons when it were casting pearls before swine to talk of holy things. And there are other times when if we were slothful, it would be a shameful waste of propitious seasons. Sluggards in the time for plowing and sowing are sluggards indeed, for they not only waste the day, but throw away the year. If you watch for souls and use hours of happy vantage and moments of sacred softening, you will not complain of the scanty space allowed for agency. Even should you never be called to water, or to reap, your office is wide enough if you fulfill the work of the sower.

For little though it seem to teach the simple truth of the Gospel, yet it is essential. How shall men hear without a teacher? The farm never brings forth a harvest without sowing. Weeds will grow without our help, but not so wheat and barley. The human heart is so depraved that it will naturally bring forth evil in abundance and Satan is quite sure not to let it lie without a sowing of evil seed, but if ever a man's soul is to yield fruit unto God, the seed of truth must be cast into it from without.

Servants of God, the seed of the Word of God is not like thistledown which is borne by every wind, nor like certain seeds wafted by their own parachutes here, there, and everywhere. No, but the wheat of the kingdom needs a human hand to sow it and without such agency it will not enter into men's hearts, neither can it bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

The preaching of the Gospel is the necessity of every age—God grant that our country may never be deprived of it. Even if the Lord should send us a famine of bread and a famine of water, may He never send us a famine of the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and how can there be hearing if there is no teaching? Scatter you, scatter you, then, the seed of the kingdom, for this is essential to the harvest. The spreading of the Gospel is not a thing that you may do or may not do, according to your pleasure, but it is a duty urgently needful, to be neglected at your peril. You can sow the seed and the seed must be sown.

This seed should be sown often, for the times are such that one sowing may not suffice. Sow again and again, for many are the foes of the wheat and if you repeat not your sowing, you may never see a harvest. The seed must be sown everywhere, too, for there are no choice corners of the world that you can afford to leave alone in the hope that they will be self-productive.

You may not leave the rich and intelligent under the notion that surely the Gospel will be found among them, for it is not so—the pride of life leads them away from God. You may not leave the poor and illiterate and say, “Surely they will of themselves feel their need of Christ.” Not so—they will sink from degradation to degradation unless you lift them with the Gospel. No tribe of man, or no peculiar constitution of the human mind, may be neglected by us, but everywhere we must preach the Word, in season and out of season.

I have heard that Captain Cook, the celebrated circumnavigator, was in one respect an admirable example to us. Wherever he landed, in whatever part of the earth it might be, he took with him a little packet of divers English seeds and he was often observed to scatter them in suitable places. He would leave the boat and wander up from the shore. He said nothing to anybody, but quietly scattered English seeds wherever he went, so that he belted the world with the flowers and herbs of his native land.

Imitate him wherever you go. Sow spiritual seed in every place that your foot shall tread. Some of you will before long be at the seaside, or amidst the mountains of Switzerland, or in some other regions of the earth, in the search of variety and beauty—carry the heavenly seeds with you and be not satisfied unless in every place you let fall a grain or two that may bring forth fruit unto your God. This is what you can do—mind that you do it.

Let us now think of what you cannot do. *You cannot, after the seed has left your hand, cause it to put forth life.* I am sure you cannot make it grow, for you do not know how it grows. The text says, “And the seed should spring and grow up, he knows not how.” That which is beyond the range of our knowledge is certainly beyond the reach of our power. Can you make a seed germinate? You may place it under circumstances of damp and heat which will cause it to swell and break forth with a shoot, but the germination itself is beyond you. How is it done? We know not. After the germ has been put forth, can you make it further grow, and develop its life into leaf and stem? No, that, too, is out of your power.

And when the green, grassy blade has been succeeded by the ear, can you ripen it? It will be ripened, but can *you* do it? You know you cannot. You can have no finger in the actual process, though you may promote the conditions under which it is produced. Life is a mystery, growth is a mystery, ripening is a mystery—and these three mysteries are as fountains sealed against all intrusion. How comes it that there is within the ripe seed the preparations for another sowing and another growth? What is this vital principle, this secret reproducing energy? Know you anything about this?

The philosopher may say that he can explain life and growth, and straightway he will, according to the ordinary process of philosophy, bamboozle you with terms which are less understandable than the ordinary talk of infants. And then he will say, "There is the whole matter! It is as clear as possible." He cloaks his ignorance with learned jargon and then calls it wisdom. To this day it still remains true of the growth of the most common seeds—"He knows not how." The scientific man may talk about chemical combinations and physical permutations, and he may proceed to quote analogies from this and that, but still the growth of the seed remains a secret—it springs, "He knows not how."

Certainly this is true of the rise and progress of the Word of God in the heart. It enters the soul and roots itself you know not how. Naturally men hate the Word, but it enters and it changes the heart so that they come to love it, but we know not how. Their whole nature is renewed, so that instead of producing sin, it yields repentance, faith, and love, but we know not how. How it is that the Spirit of God deals with the mind of man, how He creates the new heart and the right spirit, how we are begotten again unto a lively hope, how we are born of the Spirit, we cannot tell.

The Holy Ghost enters into us. We hear not His voice, we see not His light, we feel not His touch—yet He works an effectual work upon us, which we are not long in perceiving. We know that the work of the Spirit is a new creation, a resurrection, a quickening from the dead—but all these words are only covers to our utter ignorance of the mode of His working, with which it is not in our power to meddle. We do not know how He performs His miracles of love, and not knowing how He works, we may be quite sure that we cannot take the work out of His hands. We cannot create, we cannot quicken, we cannot transform, we cannot regenerate, we cannot save.

This work of God having proceeded in the growth of the seed, what next? *We can reap the ripe ears.* After a season, God the Holy Spirit uses His servants again. As soon as the living seed has produced, first of all the blade of thought, and afterwards the green ear of conviction, and then faith, which is as the full corn in the ear—then the Christian worker comes in for further service, for *he can reap*. "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle." This is not the reaping of the last great day, for that does not come within the scope of the parable, which evidently relates to a human sower and reaper.

The kind of reaping which the Savior here intends is that which He referred to when He said to His disciples, "Lift up now your eyes, for behold the fields are white already to the harvest." After He had been sowing the seed in the hearts of the Samaritans and it had sprung up so that they began to evince faith in Him, the Lord Jesus cried, "The fields are white unto the harvest." The apostle says, "One sows, and another reaps." Our Lord said to the disciples, "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labor." Is there not a promise, "in due season you shall reap if you faint not"?

Christian workers begin their harvest work by watching carefully to see when men evince signs of faith in Christ. They are eager to see the blade and delighted to mark the ripening ear. They often hope that men are believers, but they long to be sure of it—and when they judge at last the fruit of faith is put forth, they begin to encourage, to congratulate, and to comfort. They know that the young believer needs to be housed in the barn of Christian fellowship, that he may be saved from a thousand perils. No wise farmer leaves the fruit of the field long exposed to the hail which might beat it out, or the mildew which might destroy it, or the birds which might despoil it. Evidently no believing man should be left outside of the garner of holy fellowship—he should be carried into the midst of the church with all the joy which attends the home-bringing of sheaves.

The worker for Christ watches carefully and when he discerns that his time is come, he begins at once to fetch in the converts that they may be cared for by the brotherhood, separated from the world, screened from temptation, and laid up for the Lord. He is diligent to do it at once, because the text says, "immediately he puts in the sickle." He does not wait for months in cold suspicion—he is not afraid that he shall encourage too soon when faith is really present. He comes with the word of promise and the smile of brotherly love at once, and he says to the new believer, "Have you confessed your faith? Is not

the time come for an open confession? Has not Jesus bidden the believer to be baptized? If you love Him, keep His commandments.”

He does not rest till he has introduced the convert to the communion of the faithful. For our work, beloved, is but half done when men are made disciples and baptized. We have then to encourage, to instruct, to strengthen, to console, and succor in all times of difficulty and danger. What says the Savior? “Go you, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.”

The reaper is the man who gathers in the converts, and he fulfils an honorable and useful office. If I preach the Gospel today and some shall be converted, I shall be the sower—but if going home to the respective towns in which you live, you who have dropped in here as strangers, shall be received into the churches by your own pastors, they will be reaping what I have sown. I envy not my brother minister his success in gathering in the converts, but I rejoice with him. The sower and the reaper may well rejoice together, for our work is one and we labor for one Lord.

Observe, then, the sphere of agency. We can introduce the truth to men, but that truth the Lord Himself must bless. The living and growing of the Word within the soul is the operation of God alone. When the mystic work of growth is done, we are able to introduce the saved ones into the church. To bring them into the fellowship of the faithful is our work and we must not fail to do it. For Christ to be formed in men, the hope of glory, is not of our working—that remains with God—but when Jesus Christ is formed in them, to discern the image of the Savior and to say, “Come in, you blessed of the Lord, wherefore stand you outside?” is our duty and delight.

To create the divine life is God’s, to cherish it is ours. To cause the hidden life to grow in secret is the work of the Lord. To see the rising up and perfecting of that life and to rejoice in it is the work of the faithful, even as it is written, “when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest is come.”

This, then, is our first lesson—we see what we can do and what we cannot do.

II. Our second head is like unto the first, and consists of WHAT WE CAN KNOW AND WHAT WE CANNOT KNOW.

First, *what we can know*. We can know when we have sown the good seed of the Word that it will grow, for God has promised that it shall do so. Not every grain in every place, for some will go to the birds, and some to the worm, and some to be scorched by the sun. But as a general rule, God’s Word shall not return unto Him void, it shall prosper in the thing whereto He has sent it. This we can know.

And we can know that the seed, when once it takes root, will continue to grow, that it is not a dream or a picture that will disappear, but a thing of force and energy, which will advance from a grassy blade to corn in the ear, and under God’s blessing will develop to actual salvation and be as the “full corn in the ear.” God helping and blessing it, our work of teaching will not only lead men to thought and conviction, but to conversion and eternal life.

We also can know, because we are told so, that the reason for this is mainly because there is life in the Word. In the Word of God itself there is life, for it is written—“The word of God is quick and powerful”—that is, “living and powerful.” It is “the incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever.” It is the nature of living seeds to grow, and the reason why the Word of God grows in men’s hearts is because it is the living Word of the living God, and where the word of a king is, there is power. We know this, because the Scriptures teach us so. Is it not written, “Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth”?

Moreover, the earth, which is here the type of the man, “brings forth fruit of herself.” We must mind what we are doing in expounding this, for human hearts do not produce faith of themselves—they are as hard rock on which the seed of God perishes. But it means this—that as the earth under the blessing of the dew and the rain is, by Gods secret working upon it, made to take up and embrace the seed, so the heart of man is made ready to receive and enfold the Gospel of Jesus Christ within itself.

There is a something congruous in the earth to the seed which is sown in it, so that the seed is adopted and nourished by the soil. Just so is it by the heart of man when God makes it honest and good ground. Man's awakened heart wants exactly what the Word of God supplies. Moved by a divine influence, the soul embraces the truth, and is embraced by it so the truth lives in the heart and is quickened by it. The man's love accepts the love of God—man's faith wrought in him by the Spirit of God believes the truth of God. Man's hope wrought in Him by the Spirit of God lays hold upon the things revealed and so the heavenly seed grows in the soil of the soul.

The life comes not from you who preach the Word, but it is placed within the Word which you preach by the Holy Spirit. The life is not in your hand, but in the man himself who is led to take hold upon the truth by the Spirit of God. Salvation comes not from the personal authority of the preacher, but through the personal conviction, personal faith, and personal love of the hearer.

You, the sower, are thus taught by the parable that spiritual life and growth are of God, and come by the seed and the soil far more than by you. So far as the truth is concerned, its intrinsic power is the same whoever preaches it. It is not because such-and-such a preacher, whom God has blessed, tells out the Gospel that therefore it lives in men's hearts. Oh, no. It is because of the truth itself, and because of the hearts themselves which receive the truth by the secret working of God's blessed Spirit. So much as this we may know and is it not enough for all practical purposes?

Still, there is *a something which we cannot know*—a secret into which we cannot pry. I repeat what I have said before, you cannot look into men's inward parts and see exactly how the truth takes hold upon the heart, or the heart takes hold upon the truth. Many have watched their own feelings till they have become blind with despondency, and others have watched the feelings of the young till they have done them more harm than good by their rigorous supervision. In God's work there is more room for faith than for sight. The heavenly seed grows secretly. You must bury it out of sight or there will be no harvest. Even if you keep the seed above ground and it does sprout, you cannot discover *how* it grows. Even though you microscopically watched its swelling and bursting, you could not see the inward vital force which moves the seed.

Behind the veil which conceals the secret working of God in the mysteries of natural life and growth, you cannot pry. And as for the divine life in man, it must forever be hidden from all mortal eyes. The result of it you shall be able to see, and something about the way of its development you shall be able to know, but the actual *modus operandi*, the secret and innermost mystery of the new birth, it shall not be given to you to perceive. You know not the way of the Spirit. His work is wrought in secret and you cannot tell whence He comes or whither He goes. "Explain the new birth," says somebody. My answer is, "Experience the new birth and you shall know what it is." There are secrets into which we cannot enter, for their light is too bright for mortal eyes to endure.

O man, you cannot become omniscient, for you are a creature and not the Creator. For you there must always be a region not only unknown but unknowable. So far shall your knowledge go, but no further—and you may thank God it is so, for thus He leaves room for faith and gives cause for prayer. Cry mightily unto the Great Worker to do what you cannot attempt to perform, that so, when you see the salvation of men, you may always give Him all the glory evermore.

III. Thirdly, our text tells us WHAT WE MAY EXPECT IF WE WORK FOR GOD AND WHAT WE MAY NOT EXPECT.

According to this parable we may expect to see fruit. The husbandman casts his seed into the ground, and the seed springs and grows, and he may expect a harvest. I wish I could say a word to stir up the expectations of Christian workers, for I fear that many work without faith. If you have a garden or a field, and you sow seed in it, you would be very greatly surprised and grieved if it did not come up at all. But many Christian people seem quite content to work on and on, and they never reckon upon results so much as to look for it expectantly.

This is a pitiful kind of working—pulling up empty buckets by the year together. Surely I must either see a result for my labor and be glad, or else, failing to see it, I must be ready to break my heart if

I be a true servant of the great Master. We ought to expect results. If we had expected more, we should have seen more, but a lack of expectation has been a great cause of failure in God's workers.

But we may not expect to see all the seed which we sow spring up the moment we sow it. Sometimes, glory be to God, we have but to deliver the Word and straightway men are converted—the reaper overtakes the sower, in such instances, but it is not always so. Some sowers have been diligent for years upon certain plots of ground, and apparently all has been in vain, till at the last the harvest has come, a harvest which, speaking after the manner of men, had never been reaped if they had not persevered to the end.

This world, as I believe, is to be converted to Christ—but not today, nor tomorrow, peradventure not for many an age. But the sowing of the centuries is not being lost, it is all working on towards the grand ultimatum. A crop of mushrooms may soon be produced, but a forest of oaks will not reward the planter till generations of his children have molded into the dust. It is ours to sow and to hope for quick reaping, but still we ought to remember, “the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth and has long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain,” and so must we. We are to expect results, but not to be dispirited if we see them not today or on the morrow.

We are also to expect to see the good seed grow, but not always after our fashion. We are nearly all of us like children, for there are still not many fathers, and like children we are apt to be impatient. Your little boy sowed mustard and cress yesterday in his little garden. This afternoon Master Johnny will be turning over the ground to see if the seed is growing. There is no probability that his mustard and cress will come to anything, for he will not leave it alone long enough for it to grow.

So is it with hasty workers—they must see the result of the Gospel directly, or else they will leave off and distrust the blessed Word. Although the people may have taken the Word into their minds and may be considering it, certain preachers are in such a hurry that they will allow no time for thought, no space for counting the cost, no opportunity for men to consider their ways and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart. All other seeds take time to grow but the seed of the Word must grow before the speaker's eyes like magic, or he thinks nothing has been done.

Such good brethren are so eager to produce blades and ears, there and then, that they roast their seed in the fire of fanaticism and it never lives at all. They make men think that they are converted and thus effectually hinder them from coming to a saving knowledge of the truth. I am solemnly convinced that some men are prevented from being saved by being told that they are already saved and by being puffed up with a notion of perfection when they are not even broken in heart. Perhaps if such people had been taught to look for something deeper, they might not have been satisfied with receiving the seed on stony ground. But now they are content with that which comes of seed sown on unbroken rocks—they exhibit a rapid development, and an equally rapid decline and fall. Let us believingly expect to see the seed grow, but let us look to see it advance after the manner of the preacher—firstly, secondly, thirdly—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

You are in a hurry, my brother, but it were better to exhibit the patience of principle than the heat of passion. Let all men be in a hurry to be saved, but let those who are preaching the truth be content to see men convicted of sin, delivered from self-confidence, enlightened as to the grace of God, and thus led by sure steps to faith. Some of the best of Christians do not know the exact point at which they were converted—it was a gradual process, from green blade to ripe ear, and they cannot tell exactly when the actual fruit of faith was formed in them.

Some of the most thoughtful minds are not jerked on a sudden into religion, but are brought gradually into the light, even as the noon of day draws on by degrees. With many there is at first nothing but a little blade, you cannot tell whether it is grass and grass only. Their feeling looks like a natural emotion caused by the fear of hell and this might lead to nothing effectual. Then follows a little belief, so formed as to be like the wheat-ear of faith, and yet it may only be a notion. It takes time with such persons before they show the full corn of assured faith in Jesus. Growth is often, if not generally, gradual and shall we wish to alter God's method of working? We may expect the seed to grow, but

every soil is not equally sharp and speedy, and we must not demand of God that He shall work uniformly after the same rate of speed.

We may expect also to see the seed ripen. Our work will lead up by God's grace to real faith in those He has wrought upon by His Word and Spirit, but we must not expect to see it perfect at the first. How many mistakes have been made here. Here is a young person under impression and some good sound brother talks with that young person and asks profound questions. He shakes his experienced head and knits his furrowed brows. He goes into the corn field to see how the crops are prospering and though it is early in the year, he laments that he cannot see one ear of corn. Indeed, he perceives nothing but mere grass. "I cannot see a trace of corn," says he. No, brother, of course you cannot, for you will not be satisfied with the blade as an evidence of life, but must insist upon seeing everything at full growth at once. If you had looked for the blade you would have found it and it would have encouraged you.

For my own part, I am glad even to perceive a faint desire, a feeble longing, a degree of uneasiness, or a measure of weariness of sin, or a craving after mercy. Will it not be wise for you, also, to allow things to begin at the beginning and to be satisfied with their being small at first? See the blade of desire and then watch for more. Soon you shall see a little more than desire, for there shall be conviction and resolve—and after that a feeble faith, small as a mustard seed, but bound to grow. Do not despise the day of small things. Do not examine the new-born babe about Calvinism in its different shades to see whether he is sound after your idea of soundness. Ten to one he is a long way off sound and you will only worry the dear heart by introducing difficult questions.

Speak to him about his being a sinner, and Christ a Savior and you will, in this way, water him, so that his grace in the ear will become the full corn. It may be that there is not much that looks like wheat about him yet, but by-and-by you will say, "Wheat! Ah, that it is, if I know wheat. This man is a true ear of corn and gladly will I place him among my Master's sheaves." If you crush the blades, where will the ears come from? If you cut off the green ears, where will the ripe ones be? Expect grace in your converts, but do not look to see glory in them just yet. It is enough if you see heaven begun—do not look to see it complete in those here below.

Expect, then, brethren—for you may expect it—to see a harvest, but do not expect to find every seed springing up. "There," says one, "that is a discouraging word." It may be so, but it is a true word. There is an old worldly proverb which says, "Blessed are those who expect nothing, for they shall never be disappointed." I do not believe in that proverb, but I believe in a moderate form of it—"Blessed are those who do not expect what is unreasonable, for they will not get it." If you young people who begin to work for God expect that every word you speak will be useful to all who hear them, it will not happen and you will grow discouraged. Therefore I would raise your expectation as high as truth permits and no higher. I would have you climb to the top of the ladder, but if I encourage you to go any higher, you will soon be going down the other side under the notion that you are ascending. I never like to see a man expecting what he will not obtain.

Now, I know that some of our seed will fall among thorns and some in stony places and I do not despair when it happens to be so. I do not expect when I preach the Gospel that everybody who hears it will receive it, because I know it will be a savor of life unto life to some, and of death unto death unto others. I pull the net in, hauling away with all my might—but I know that when it comes to shore it will contain some strange things that are not fish, which will have to be thrown away, and I am heartily glad that there will also be in it a cheering number of good fishes. The results of our ministry in these days will be mixed, even as they were when Paul preached and some believed and some believed not. We must be prepared for that, and yet I bid you let your expectations be very large, for you may have sixty or a hundred-fold of fruit from the seed if God is with you, and that will abundantly repay you, even if the crows and the worms should eat their share of the grain.

IV. The last head is this—WHAT SLEEP WORKERS MAY TAKE AND WHAT THEY MAY NOT TAKE, for it is said of this sowing man that he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up he knows not how.

They say a farmer's trade is a good one because it is going on while he is in bed and asleep. And surely ours is a good trade, too, when we serve our Master by sowing good seed, for it is growing even while we are asleep.

But how may a good workman for Christ lawfully go to sleep? I answer, first, he may sleep the sleep of restfulness born of confidence. You are afraid the kingdom of Christ will not come, are you? Who asked you to tremble for the ark of the Lord? Afraid for the infinite JEHOVAH that His purposes will fail? Shame on you! Your anxiety dishonors your God. You degrade Him by a suspicion of His failing. Shall omnipotence be defeated? You had better sleep than wake to play the part of Uzzah. Rest patiently, God's will will be done, and His kingdom will come, and His chosen will be saved, and Christ shall see of the travail of His soul. Take the sweet sleep which God gives to His beloved, the sleep of perfect confidence, such as Jesus slept in the hinder part of the ship when it was tossed with tempest. The cause of God never was in jeopardy and never will be. The seed sown is insured by omnipotence and must produce its harvest. In patience possess your soul and wait till the harvest comes, for the pleasure of the Lord must prosper in the hands of Jesus.

Also take that sleep which leads to a happy waking of joyful expectancy. Get up in the morning and feel that the Lord is ruling all things for the accomplishment of His own purpose. Look for it. If you do not sleep, you certainly will not wake up in the morning refreshed and ready for more work. If it were possible for you to sit up all night and eat the bread of carefulness, you would be unfit to attend to the service which your Master appoints for the morning. Therefore take your rest and be at peace, and work with calm dignity, for the matter is safe in the Lord's hands.

Take your rest because you have consciously resigned the work into God's hands. After you have spoken the Word, resort to God in prayer and commit it into God's hands, and then do not fret about it. It cannot be in better keeping—leave it there.

But do not sleep the sleep of unwatchfulness. The farmer sows his seed, but he does not therefore forget it. He has to mend his fences to keep the cattle out. It may be he has to drive away birds, to remove weeds, or to prevent floods. While he is not sitting down to watch the growth, he has plenty else to do. He never sleeps the sleep of indifference or even of inaction, for each season has its demand upon him. He has sown one field, but he has another to sow. He has sown, but he has also to reap. And if reaping is done, he has something else to do. He has never done, for in one part or other of the farm, he is needed. His sleep is but an interlude that gives him strength to continue in his occupations.

Consider that the parable teaches us that we have not to intrude into the domain of God, but with regard to the secret working of the truth upon man's mind, we are to take our rest and go on our way, serving our day and generation according to the will of God.

I want you, dear brethren and sisters, to come to that point this morning. "Lord, this is Your work. Lord, You can do Your own work. Lord, do Your own work—we entreat and beseech You to do it. Lord, help us to do *our* work, both at the beginning of the chapter and at the end of the chapter, confident that You will not fail in the middle of the chapter, but that You will do Your work. Help us to exercise faith in You and to go about our labor in the confidence that You are with us, and we are workers together with You."

Up, brethren, to the mountain, to the brow of Carmel, this afternoon, up there and pray that God will send a shower of heavenly rain by His Spirit. Up, Elijah. Put your head between your knees and cry till you are certain that the cloud, though it is little at first as a man's hand, will cover all the earth and water the land with blessing. Up and pray that God would sweep away all the doubts which, like locusts, devour the church today, and all love of sin and all rejection of Christ, that at this hour, even at this hour, God may glorify Himself by the feeble hand of His sower while he scatters the seed.

I beg your prayers, my dear and faithful friends, this afternoon and this evening, that the Word of the Lord may be divinely victorious. I stand back that God may work and then come forward that God may work through me—and to Him be praise forever. Amen.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.